

VANCE, Cyrus
Brown, Harold

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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

BY

CYRUS R. VANCE,
SECRETARY OF STATE
AND
HAROLD BROWN,
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The Briefing Room

3:00 P.M. EDT

SECRETARY VANCE: Good afternoon. I have an announcement to make and then I would like to make a few brief remarks.

Ambassador Dobrynin and I have concluded our negotiations on SALT. Both governments have now instructed their respective delegations at Geneva to incorporate into the joint draft treaty the agreements reached in negotiations between Ambassador Dobrynin and myself, and to complete negotiations on the few remaining secondary items which have not yet been resolved.

Details concerning the time and place of a summit meeting will be announced in the very near future.

Let me make a few comments about the significance of these negotiations. With this treaty, we will take an essential step toward a safer America and a safer world. Our overriding purpose in these negotiations has been to strengthen our Nation's security and that of our allies with practical and verifiable restraints on the nuclear arms race.

Today we are on the threshold of signing a strategic arms agreement that achieves our purpose.

The treaty will enhance the security of the United States and our allies. It will restrain the nuclear arms race. It will lessen the likelihood of nuclear war. The treaty will serve these essential interests of the American people in several concrete ways. It will establish equal ceilings on the strategic forces of the Soviet Union and the United States. It will begin the process of actually reducing the level of nuclear weapons, and it will limit not only the quantitative but also the qualitative race in nuclear arms.

MORE

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As a result, this treaty will limit the strategic challenges we would otherwise have to meet. It will hold down the expense we would have to bear to meet those challenges. And it will avoid much of the uncertainty about Soviet arms that would otherwise prevail.

This treaty will not only mark the end of one negotiation; it will open the way for another. When it is ratified by the Senate, it will become the cornerstone for still further limits in reductions in SALT III.

The national debate which we now commence is not only about this treaty. We are still considering as well the inescapable realities of a nuclear world -- the necessity to our security of a strong defense and the grave danger to our security of an unlimited race in nuclear arms, for our security today lies in maintaining a stable strategic balance between two nations with awesome power.

A SALT II treaty will make a substantial contribution to that stability. We have demonstrated to the SALT process that even as we compete in some areas, the United States and the Soviet Union can and must cooperate to lessen the dangers of war. In this way, the treaty can serve to open the path to a more constructive and peaceful relationship between us.

This treaty is a message of hope for us and for all the people of the world.

Harold?

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SECRETARY BROWN: The highest single priority in our national defense must go to the maintenance of strategic nuclear balance. I want to say a few words about how the SALT II agreement will help us to meet that need.

The outlines of the agreement are well-known. But let me repeat for you some of the main features.

There will be a limit on the number of strategic launchers. Each side can have 2250. With SALT, the Soviets will have to make some reductions. Without SALT, the Soviets could, by continuing at their present rates of deployment of new systems, have a third more than this by 1985.

There will also be sublimits on the numbers of launchers with independently targetable multiple warheads, that is, MIRVs. With the SALT II agreement, the Soviet launchers will be limited to 820 for MIRVed intercontinental ballistic missiles, the most threatening part of their force. This is fewer than we believe they planned. Without the SALT II agreement, they could have many more than that by 1985.

In addition, there will be limits on the introduction of new intercontinental ballistic systems and on the number of warheads they can carry. With a SALT II agreement, the Soviets can have, for example, ten warheads on their largest missile. Without the SALT II agreement, they could have 20, perhaps 40.

Finally, there will be a ban on interfering with international technical means of verification and there will be other provisions to make verification easier.

We now have highly capable monitoring systems. They will be bolstered by measures we are taking to replace expeditiously the capability lost in the Iranian stations.

We will be able to detect any Soviet violation in ample time to protect our military security. With a SALT II agreement, we will be able to verify the agreement from the outset. Without the SALT II agreement, we could be faced with concealment, countermeasures and so-called cheating of all sorts, because without SALT, all of these actions would be permitted.

Even with SALT, we will need to expand our defense efforts, including specifically our efforts devoted to strategic nuclear forces. We are doing so under the program now before the Congress, because SALT won't solve our strategic problems. However, SALT will contribute significantly to our security.

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With the SALT II agreement, we will be able to avoid the pressures and uncertainties of an unbounded numbers race in strategic forces. The U.S. could and would engage in such competition if we had to. But the result would be simply more systems, higher costs, and greater risks with no more security, still less a situation of U.S. superiority.

SALT II will ease some of our other problems. For example, the limit on warhead numbers will make more survivable the mobile missiles whose deployment we are considering as an answer to the growing vulnerability of our Minuteman ICBMs.

SALT II will not prevent us from doing what may be needed in areas where the Soviet challenge is not limited. For example, we will be able to work with our allies on both force modernization and on arms control in response to the problems posed by the Soviet buildup of theater nuclear forces.

SALT II will provide a firmer foundation for other measures to control the growth and spread of nuclear and conventional arms. It will permit continuation of the process of limiting superpowers strategic forces, leading, we hope, to substantial cutbacks in those arsenals.

In sum, SALT will help us maintain flexible and credible deterrence, stability and essential equivalence. Without the treaty, we could also do these things, but it would be more costly and less certain. None of the challenges we face would be less without the treaty, and some would be considerably greater. All the increases we plan in our defense efforts with SALT would still be needed without it. But many more would be needed as well.

I see the treaty as a valuable method of helping, along with our own moderately increased programs, to meet our Nation's strategic needs and, if the Soviet Union will emphasize cooperation rather than competition, SALT will also allow a healthier state of U.S.-Soviet relations.

Thank you.

SECRETARY VANCE: Thank you very much.

MR. POWELL: Ladies and gentlemen, for those of you who do not already know this, there is a background briefing on SALT that we hope to begin in about 20 minutes in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building.

END (3:10 P.M. EDT)